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THE OLD TESTAMENT TEACHING CONCERNING GOD.

By GEORGE RICKER BERRY,
Hamilton, N. Y.

FOR centuries theologians have differed greatly in their views as to the central doctrine of systematic theology. But in reference to the biblical theology of the Old Testament no such difference of opinion is found, it being generally agreed that the central position should be accorded to the doctrine of God. "The religious development of Israel is virtually a development in the idea of God."¹ The present inquiry is of importance, therefore, not only in itself, but also in its relation to the whole subject of the biblical theology of the Old Testament. Although much has been written concerning this subject, the conclusions reached have been so diverse that further consideration of the matter is not unnecessary.

An inquiry into the origin of the Old Testament teaching concerning God is not, strictly speaking, included in biblical theology. But it is a question which, besides being intrinsically of great importance, is so closely connected with that of the teaching itself that it should be considered here.

The present discussion will necessarily be rather brief, and will proceed, as already implied, from the point of view of biblical rather than of systematic theology. The aim, therefore, will be, not to present exhaustively all that the Old Testament has to say concerning God, but to consider the teachings upon which especial emphasis is placed in the Old Testament itself. Since the prophets teach theology more fully than any other part of the Old Testament, their writings will for that reason be chiefly, although by no means exclusively, considered.

As the present inquiry should keep in mind, so far as possible, chronological order in the development of thought, the important question arises: What is the chronological order of Old Testament literature? The Old Testament itself expressly indicates such

¹ A. B. DAVIDSON in HASTINGS, *A Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. II, p. 201.

an order only to a very limited extent, so that the chief guide must be the indirect indications furnished by the literature. The conclusions of higher criticism have furnished in some respects a different order from that which was formerly held. This question is one that is too large to be discussed here with any fulness. It may be sufficient to say that the present writer accepts some of the usual conclusions of higher criticism, but some he is unable to accept. It is his conviction, *e. g.*, that the dates generally given to the documents of the Hexateuch, especially D and P, are too late, at least for their substance; that Moses surely wrote the kernel of the Pentateuch, and David many of the psalms; and that such books as Joel and Proverbs are of early date. With a view to strengthening the argument, however, it has seemed best in the present discussion not to argue from passages concerning whose date there is much difference of opinion, but from those on which there is substantial agreement among most modern scholars. Occasionally when the question of date affects especially the point at issue the fact will be expressly indicated.

I. There are certain preliminary considerations with reference to the Old Testament which it will be desirable to keep in mind.

1. Neither the Old Testament as a whole nor any part of it was written distinctively as a systematic or complete theological treatise. The emphasis in each portion is put on the truth of practical importance at that particular time, while other truths, in themselves of importance, are left unmentioned. There is peculiar danger, therefore, that an argument from silence may be fallacious.

2. In general, theological questions in the Old Testament are not treated speculatively or philosophically. A speculative treatment is found, to be sure, in books like Job. But even here it is speculation designed to solve practical difficulties. It is often necessary, therefore, to be careful not to give a metaphysical meaning to words and phrases, such as they might have at the present time, but did not have when first spoken or written. Even when it is a matter of necessity or convenience to use expressions common in theological discussions of the present

day, they must often be used in a meaning somewhat different from that which they bear in modern times.

3. The distinction must be carefully made between the teachings of the Old Testament, or of any part of it, and the ideas of many of the people of Israel, even of many of the leaders. This distinction is frequently not observed, and great confusion results thereby. Nothing is more certain than that many of the Hebrews had low ideas of God, especially throughout the pre-exilic period of Old Testament history. But to grant that is a far different thing from saying that such are the teachings of the Old Testament itself. The prophets were continually proclaiming doctrines which were not followed in practice by the mass of the people. But it is the sermons of the prophets, and not the customs of the people, which contain the teachings of the Old Testament. The Old Testament recognizes the existence of much which it does not indorse.

4. There is a progressiveness in revelation in the Old Testament, as also in the New. This means, in general, that God's revelation of himself to men is conditioned by their capacity to receive the revelation—a principle clearly recognized by Christ when he said to his disciples: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now," John 16: 12. Hence, in general, there is an increasing fulness and definiteness in the teaching as we advance chronologically throughout the Old Testament.

II. The origin of the Old Testament conception of God.

This question, as often discussed, is: What was the origin of the religion of the Hebrews? Yet the form in which it is stated above really contains the substance of the matter, for the reason, already suggested, that the conception of God occupied a central position in the religion of the Hebrews.

The different views of the origin of the Old Testament conception of God may be classified as follows:

1. The explanation has been given that the Semitic disposition naturally inclined to monotheism, or at least to something approximating to it. This view has been held by Renan,²

² *Journal asiatique*, 1859.

Hitzig,³ and others.⁴ In favor of it it has been urged that the three great monotheistic religions of the world—Judaism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism—are of Semitic origin. Increasing knowledge of the Semitic nations, however, has shown the untenableness of this view. The three religions named were not independent in origin; Judaism and Christianity are really one, and both originated among the Hebrews. The essence of Mohammedanism was borrowed from Judaism and Christianity, chiefly the former. For its monotheism it is certainly indebted to Judaism. The Arabs before the time of Mohammed were polytheistic, and so in fact were all the other Semitic nations, except the Hebrews. Even the Hebrews found it only too easy to relapse into polytheism. So this view is plainly disproved by the facts now known. It may further be said that, even if this explanation were sufficient to account for the monotheism of the Hebrews, it would still be an inadequate explanation, because the essence of the Old Testament teaching concerning God is so much more than monotheism, the holiness of God being, in fact, fully as fundamental.

2. The explanation has been given that the religion of Israel, especially their conception of God, was, in its essence, borrowed from some external source. Many different views concerning this source have been held. Some, in older times, have thought that it was to be found in the far-famed Chaldean wisdom, which Abraham brought with him from Ur of the Chaldees. But we now know enough of the religion of Mesopotamia in the time of Abraham to affirm positively that it was radically unlike that of Israel.

Kaiser, Schiller, and Plessing have sought the source in Egypt, and with them Decius and von Cölln have agreed in part.⁵ Their explanation is that the Egyptian priests had a secret monotheistic teaching, which was transmitted from age to age, and into which Moses was initiated. Against this view it

³ *Vorlesungen über biblische Theologie und messianische Weissagungen des Alten Testaments*, pp. 11-14.

⁴ See in general DILLMANN, *Handbuch der alttestamentlichen Theologie*, pp. 59 f.

⁵ See for this view DILLMANN, *ibid.*, pp. 52 f.

may be said, as Dillmann⁶ has done, that the belief in the existence of any real monotheism in Egypt is now generally thought to have no solid foundation. Besides, as already stated, the Old Testament conception of God is much more than monotheism, so that, even if the existence of a possible source of monotheistic teaching could be shown, the religion of the Old Testament would still be unaccounted for. On general grounds, also, the improbability of this explanation is seen, because the history of Moses' time emphasizes the contrast between the religion of the Hebrews and of Egypt; it gives no hint of similarity.

Others think that Yahweh was the god of Jethro (Reuel), and that his worship was borrowed by the Hebrews from Jethro and the Midianites. Among those who have held this view in some form are Ghillany, Tiele, Stade,⁷ Smend,⁸ and Budde.⁹ This is really a conjecture, based chiefly on the fact that Jethro was the father-in-law of Moses and appears prominently in connection with him at various times. In reply it may be sufficient to say that there is no evidence in favor of the view, and that, in fact, what Jethro is said to have furnished Moses was not teaching concerning God, but only advice in certain practical matters concerning the administration of justice.

The various attempts which have been made to explain the *name* "Yahweh," as derived or borrowed from some foreign language, by Voltaire, Schiller, Bohlen, Brugsch, Hartmann, Hitzig, Hoffmann, Niebuhr, Hommel,¹⁰ etc., need not be considered here in detail, because in most cases they are concerned merely with the *name*, and do not imply a foreign origin for the religion of Yahweh itself.

3. The conception of God is often explained as the result simply of development or evolution. The original conception of the Hebrews is supposed to have been that of a national god, who was in essence a nature-god, or personification of some of

⁶ DILLMANN, *Handbuch der alttestamentlichen Theologie*, pp. 53 f.

⁷ STADE, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, Vol. I, pp. 126, 133.

⁸ *Lehrbuch der alttestamentlichen Religionsgeschichte*, p. 30.

⁹ In general see DILLMANN, *op. cit.*, p. 103, note 1.

¹⁰ See for these views especially KÖNIG, *Expository Times*, January, 1899, pp. 189-92.

the forces of nature, and this conception was adopted by Moses without substantial change. The higher conception, that of an ethical God, was introduced by the prophets, but even then was developed out of the older idea by a purely natural process. According to this view, the religion of the Hebrews differed only in slight details, not in essence, from that of their Semitic neighbors, the Edomites, Moabites, and others. This is essentially the view of Kuenen,¹¹ Duhm,¹² Wellhausen,¹³ Stade,¹⁴ Smend,¹⁵ and others.¹⁶ Most of these would hold that Yahweh was originally a personification of light.

Against this view it may be said: (a) The question is primarily one of fact. As such, the chief argument urged in its favor from the Old Testament is fallacious. That argument is substantially this: Because in the earlier times many of the Hebrews had no higher ideas of God than those of the surrounding nations, therefore the Hebrew idea of God as a whole was of this same low character. We have already spoken of the distinction which shows the inconclusiveness of this reasoning. In reality the evidence of the Old Testament is all against this view, in two ways. On the one hand, manifold passages make it plain that the conception of God held by the Hebrews in the time of Moses or earlier was much higher than that of the surrounding nations. This appears from the explicit teachings of Moses, as in the ten commandments, which teach practical monotheism and the spirituality of God, as will be seen more fully in the later discussion; which are teachings far higher than could be found elsewhere at that time. It also appears from the rebukes given to Israel by Moses, and by others afterward, for sharing the ideas and following the customs of the surrounding nations. On the other hand, it is equally evident from many passages that the prophets did not represent themselves as

¹¹ *Gesammelte Abhandlungen*, pp. 313-29.

¹² *Die Theologie der Propheten*, pp. 73-91, 103, etc.

¹³ *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte*³, pp. 22-35 and 123-32.

¹⁴ *Geschichte Israels*, Vol. I, especially pp. 428-39.

¹⁵ *Lehrbuch der alttestamentlichen Religionsgeschichte*, pp. 12-27, 159-67, etc.

¹⁶ See DILLMANN, *Handbuch der alttestamentlichen Theologie*, pp. 54 ff.

preaching a doctrine that was new and radically different from that which had preceded, but as giving teachings which, at least in germ, were familiar, but were now more fully unfolded and emphatically stated. The attitude of the prophets is regularly that of severe reproof of the people for not practicing that which is already familiar to them, but which they have allowed themselves to neglect. (*b*) The change supposed is, in the nature of the case, incredible. A nature religion cannot by its own inherent force develop into an ethical religion; the two things are radically different. The evolution of an ethical religion from a nature religion pure and simple is impossible, because it is an effect without a cause. By the mere working of evolution the prophets themselves would not have become teachers of an ethical religion, but soothsayers and diviners, as the prophets were in the surrounding nations, and as they were in Greece and Rome. The Old Testament religion shows a moral life flowing from its ethical character which exists nowhere else in antiquity. To account for this merely by evolution is as impossible as to account for the origin of physical life by evolution, which is apparently a hopeless task, although many scientists dream of being able to accomplish it some day.

4. The religion of Israel in general, including the conception of God, shows simply the remains of a primitive revelation made in the very beginnings of humanity upon earth. This was a common older view, but is now generally abandoned. It is possible that there are traces of knowledge from this source. But they must be slight, as shown, *e. g.*, by the fact that even the immediate ancestors of Abraham were polytheists. The explanation is decidedly insufficient to account for the facts.

5. The Old Testament teaching concerning God is the result of revelation from God made "by divers portions and in divers manners," to Moses, and to patriarchs, prophets, and poets before and after his time. There are manifold lines of proof that the Old Testament gives a revelation from God. We are here directly concerned, however, only with the question whether its teaching concerning God is the result of revelation from God. To establish this point there are two especially important lines of proof:

(a) This is throughout the consistent claim of the Old Testament. Moses is said to have received a call from Yahweh and to have taught the people what was revealed to him by Yahweh. The other prophets as well were continually saying: "Thus saith Yahweh." These statements do not at all explicitly define the method or extent of this revelation, but positively assert the fact. (b) This is the only adequate explanation of the plain facts which meet us, the only one in which the cause is sufficient for the effect. The more fully the Old Testament conception of God is compared with that current among the surrounding nations, even the kindred Semitic nations, the more striking is seen to be the contrast between them. What kind of a conception of God could be attained in the times of the Hebrews merely by the natural efforts of nations comparatively civilized, intelligent, and religious, is clearly shown by Moab, Edom, and Phœnicia, with their national gods, who were but nature-gods; or by Babylonia and Assyria, with their pantheon, in which was no god who was more than a magnified image of his worshiper. The Old Testament teaching is distinguished fundamentally from all these, not only by its monotheism, but also by a conception of the holiness of God, in which is included moral purity, which makes the Old Testament religion an ethical one and affords a sound basis for morality. Such teachings are absolutely unique among the religious teachings of antiquity, and can have come only from revelation.

III. We pass to a consideration of the teaching itself of the Old Testament concerning the nature and attributes of God.

1. The nature of God.

(a) The unity of God, or monotheism. It is claimed by many that in the Old Testament real monotheism does not appear until a late date. The time of its appearance is somewhat disputed, but by Baudissin¹⁷ it is put as late as the time of Jeremiah. Those who maintain this view hold that all the early teaching which approximates to monotheism is really henotheism or monolatry, the latter being the more appropriate term. In other words, it is claimed that the teaching of Moses, and the teaching

¹⁷See PIEPENBRING, *Theology of the Old Testament*, pp. 93 ff.

for centuries after his time, was not, There is no God except Yahweh, but, It is your duty to worship Yahweh, because he is the national God of Israel, just as Chemosh is the national god of Moab. This is claimed to be the teaching of the first commandment: "Thou shalt have none other gods before me," Exod. 20:3. It is also thought to be favored by many passages which speak of Yahweh as the God of Israel and Israel as the people of Yahweh. This view is presented popularly by Rev. Arthur E. Whatham.¹⁸

This view is apparently the common Semitic idea of national gods, based originally on the notion that there is a physical connection between a god and his people. It must not be thought to be necessarily identical, however, with the one previously mentioned, which would make the religion of Moses entirely identical in substance with that of the surrounding nations. In the view now being considered Israel is like the surrounding nations in believing in national gods, but may be superior to them in having to some extent an ethical conception of God.

The question as to the correctness of this view is perhaps partly one as to the use of language. If the term "monolatry," as here used, is intended to include any *express recognition* of the existence of the gods of other nations, then the view must be regarded as unfounded. There is no such express recognition in the language quoted in favor of the view. If, however, the term means to imply simply that the existence of the gods of other nations was not explicitly denied, the view may be regarded as probably correct. If the latter statement is all that is meant, however, then the term *practical monotheism* really represents the facts better than *monolatry*. This is no more than would be expected from the practical rather than speculative nature of the Old Testament. In a world of polytheism the first practical necessity was to have nothing to do with other gods, whether real or unreal; later came the forcible assertions of their non-existence, theoretical monotheism. But even in the early times there are many things which show a higher idea of God than that of the

¹⁸ "Were the Israelites Ever Polytheists?" *Biblical World*, May, 1899, pp. 293-307.

surrounding nations, and point in the direction of monotheism. "If the decalogue be Mosaic, there was virtual monotheism in Israel since the exodus, though it might be only among the higher minds, and more latent than conscious."¹⁹ Some indications of this "latent" monotheism from early times, justifying the interpretation of the first commandment as teaching practical monotheism, are the following: (1) Specific phrases are used in passages of early date, which do not expressly assert, but imply, monotheism. Here may be mentioned such passages as 1 Sam. 2:2, in the song of Hannah: "There is none holy as Yahweh; for there is none beside thee;" 2 Sam. 7:22, the words of David: "Wherefore thou art great, O Yahweh God! for there is none like thee;" and 2 Sam. 22:32 (= Ps. 18:31), the words of David: "For who is God, save Yahweh? and who is a rock, save our God?" (2) In passages in Genesis admittedly of early date the God of the Hebrews is described as the creator of heaven and earth and the ruler of the earth. Thus in the words of Abraham, Gen. 18:25, he is called the judge of all the earth. This is inconsistent with the idea of national gods. (3) The national god was a local god, who lived and manifested his power in his own land. How can this be reconciled with the teaching concerning Yahweh, that he was with Israel in power in all their wanderings from the time of Abraham till the final subjugation of Palestine, and even when settled in the land of Egypt? (4) No passage of the Old Testament indicates any physical connection between Yahweh and Israel as the basis of their relation. The reason for the relation is God's free choice of Israel, and the bond of connection is the covenant which demands from Israel a character morally like Yahweh. This is in entire contrast with the idea of physical connection among the surrounding nations.

These reasons seem sufficient for saying that the teaching of the Old Testament throughout may be called monotheism, considered especially from the practical side at first, and later from the theoretical point of view as well. Expressions indicating theoretical monotheism are, however, found quite early. The history of Elijah speaks of him as emphasizing the conflict

¹⁹ A. B. DAVIDSON in HASTINGS, *A Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. II, p. 202.

between Yahweh and Baal, insisting that both cannot be gods. Stronger expressions are found in Amos, who called the foreign gods lies, 2:4, and in Hosea, who spoke of the calf of Samaria as a not-god, 8:5, *cf.* 4. Isaiah emphasizes strongly the vanity of other gods besides Yahweh, using of them frequently the expression אֱלִילִים, *things of naught*, asserting that they are actually non-existent. Isaiah is the first writer of certain date to use this expression of idols, Lev. 19:4 and 26:1 being of disputed date. After Isaiah it is so used by several other writers.

(*b*) God is a person. This is the teaching of the Old Testament throughout, and there is no great progress of thought on this point. The thought of God as a metaphysical abstraction, or as a great unknown force moving in the universe, is utterly foreign to the Old Testament. The tendency is rather to what seems at times like an excessive emphasis on personality, leading to anthropomorphism, which will be discussed more fully later. In some ways the transcendence of God is emphasized, as will be seen, but his immanence is continually prominent. It is said of Moses as an exceptional thing, Exod. 33:11: "And Yahweh spoke unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend." Yet the later prophets also continually laid emphasis on the personality of God, as he acts unceasingly in his world and comes very near to men.

(*c*) God is always represented as a spirit. This is a thought which needs especially to be kept in mind by the side of that just mentioned.

It might seem at first sight as if this were not the teaching of the Old Testament. For God is definitely associated with certain places; he is worshiped at the tabernacle, and later at the temple; he dwells above the mercy-seat; and he manifests himself to men in connection with the phenomena of nature, such as clouds, storms, thunder, lightning, etc. Also in the common anthropomorphism, including in this term anthropopathism, of the Old Testament, God is frequently spoken of in language such as is used of men. But, on the other hand, it should be noticed that many expressions are used which teach clearly that God is not identical

with, nor necessarily associated with, those places and phenomena in connection with which he frequently manifests himself. *E. g.*, in Solomon's dedicatory prayer, 1 Kings, chap. 8, the heavens are spoken of in popular language as the dwelling-place of Yahweh, as in vs. 30: "hear thou in heaven thy dwelling-place;" and so also in vss. 32, 34, 36, etc. But in the same prayer it is recognized that in reality God can have no abode; thus in vs. 27: "But will God in very deed dwell on the earth? behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded!" So also the language of the later times, Ps. 104: 2, "Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment," only expresses definitely the distinction between God himself and the phenomena of nature with which he clothes himself, which is elsewhere implied.

In reference to the matter of anthropomorphisms, it is to be noticed that the Old Testament shows a reserve in their use which is in marked contrast with the usage of the other nations of antiquity, in which the anthropomorphic details are elaborated with great realism. An especially instructive contrast is afforded by the anthropomorphic expression used concerning the sacrifice of Noah, Gen. 8:21, "And Yahweh smelled the sweet savor," when compared with the expression used in a similar connection in the Babylonian account of the deluge: "The gods smelled the savor, the gods smelled the sweet-smelling savor, the gods gathered like flies over the sacrifices."²⁰

In general, the anthropomorphism of the Old Testament may be accounted for partly on historical grounds, it being a result of the fact that the writers and speakers used popular language in order to be intelligible to the people of their own times. The explanation is also partly that anthropomorphism, then as now, was a necessity in thinking and speaking of God, unless one would go to the extreme of thinking of him as a mere philosophical abstraction. The conception of the personality of God made anthropomorphism necessary.

It may, however, be positively affirmed that even in early times there was given direct teaching which states or implies the

²⁰ "Epic of Gilgamesh," ll. 160-62 (IV Rawlinson, second edition, plates 43 f.).

spirituality of God. This appears chiefly from the second commandment, Exod. 20:4, 5: "Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor the likeness of any form that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them nor serve them." Here what is forbidden is the representation of Yahweh by any kind of an image for worship. It is not therein expressly stated that God is invisible and incorporeal, but that is naturally implied. The only special advance made in the later times on this point is that in general the prophets lay more emphasis on the fact that God is unlike man and exalted far above him, and also far above all created things. Hence the worship inculcated by the prophets is the worship of God as a spirit; it does not consist essentially of external acts performed at certain places and times, such as sacrifices, but of that which is internal, the attitude of the heart toward God, manifesting itself in a right life. This is not peculiar to any one prophet, but is the common prophetic teaching. What will be said under the next head will also indicate somewhat in detail how God as a spirit was conceived.

2. The metaphysical attributes of God. For convenience the terminology of Piepenbring²¹ is adopted, and the *metaphysical* attributes are here spoken of, and later the *moral* attributes. The term "metaphysical" is not to be taken fully in the modern sense; even those attributes which may be called metaphysical are contemplated from the practical standpoint.

All these metaphysical attributes we should probably sum up by saying that God is infinite. The Old Testament expresses substantially the same thought from the practical side by speaking of the majesty of God, and using other similar phrases. Our term is metaphysical, meaning that God *cannot* be bound by *any* limitations. The Old Testament term is practical, meaning rather that God *is* not bound by any limitations *such as man experiences*; he is above them, he is superhuman, supernatural. This has been put very justly by Schultz²² in a passage which may be

²¹ *Theology of the Old Testament*, pp. 114, 120.

²² *Alttestamentliche Theologie*, p. 418.

translated: "Not the idea of the Absolute interested the pious, but the power of the divine personality, its actual protection, and its genuine providence. One saw in the personal freedom of God, over against time, space, and created things, the certainty that he is the covenant God of his people, who is absolutely trustworthy and hindered by no limitations."

This general teaching of the majesty or infinitude of God first appears prominently in the Davidic psalms, although with many suggestions before that time. It is expressed with great poetic beauty in such Davidic psalms as Ps. 18. Later it is found most prominently in Isaiah and Deutero-Isaiah, in such passages as Isa. 2:11: "The lofty looks of man shall be brought low, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and Yahweh alone shall be exalted in that day;" and Isa. 57:15: "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit."

As subdivisions under this head we may mention:

(a) God is not bound by the ordinary limitations of time. Here, too, we must remember that it is from the practical side that this attribute is spoken of; the life of God is not like the life of man, the time limits of humanity do not apply to him, no time limit is assigned to him. In modern phrase we should say: "God is eternal;" and this really represents the Old Testament teaching, only putting it in a more theoretical form. Of course, the theoretical side becomes more prominent in the later parts of the Old Testament. A further indication of the general practical nature of the Old Testament treatment is afforded by the fact that it is not the eternity of God in itself, but in its effects, which is usually contemplated. Thus it is said frequently that the kingdom or rule of Yahweh is eternal, as in Exod. 15:18: "Yahweh shall reign for ever and ever," and Ps. 10:16: "Yahweh is king for ever and ever;" his mercy is eternal, Ps. 103:17: "But the mercy of Yahweh is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children;" the same is true of his salvation, Isa. 51:6: "The heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax

old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished;" and of his word, Isa. 40:8: "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever." So far as the strength of these passages depends on the Hebrew words for "eternity," especially עולם and עַד, it needs to be kept in mind that they often do not mean more than "indefinite duration." But in many of the passages quoted, especially the later passages, stronger expressions are used.

The development and emphasis of this attribute is found in the later times, especially in Deutero-Isaiah. This is seen from the quotations already given, and also from such passages as Isa. 41:4: "Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I, Yahweh, the first, and with the last, I am he;" 43:10: "Before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me;" 44:6: "Thus saith Yahweh, the King of Israel, and his redeemer Yahweh of hosts: I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God;" and 48:12: "Hearken unto me, O Jacob, and Israel my called: I am he; I am the first, I also am the last." This attribute will be referred to again in another connection.

(b) The freedom of the power of God from human limitations, or, in modern, more theoretical, phrase, the omnipotence of God. In the practical form of treatment of the Old Testament it means that the power of God is dwelt upon, that no limits are assigned to it. This is an attribute on which naturally special stress is laid in the Old Testament. With equal naturalness it is a trait which is specially emphasized in all other religions. While in the polytheistic religions, however, the power of the gods is greater than that of men, yet the gods are represented as working against each other, so that the power of each one is very much limited. In the Old Testament there is no such limitation, but God has created and governs all things. His hand, his arm, his power, his strength, are often spoken of, in all parts of the Old Testament; see, *e.g.*, Gen. 18:14: "Is anything too hard for Yahweh?" The prophets in general develop the

thought by laying special emphasis upon God's power in controlling the destinies of other nations as well as of Israel. Thus in Amos 9: 7 Yahweh says: "Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir?" In Habakkuk it is Yahweh who raises up the Chaldeans, and it is Yahweh also who shall cause their destruction. In Jer., chap. 18, not only Israel, but other nations, are in the power of Yahweh, as clay in the hands of a potter. In Deutero-Isaiah occur such expressions as this, 43: 13: "Yea, since the day was I am he; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it?"

(c) The freedom of God from the limitations of space, or, in modern theoretical phrase, the omnipresence of God. This is viewed no less practically than those which have preceded it. This attribute is expressed strongly even in early times, as in Gen. 28: 15, in the language of God to Jacob: "And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee whithersoever thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." It is expressed very strongly by Amos, from the theoretical as well as the practical side, 9: 2-4: "Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them. And though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down; and though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence; and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent and he shall bite them. And though they go into captivity before their enemies, thence will I command the sword and it shall slay them; and I will set mine eyes upon them for evil and not for good;" and also by Jeremiah, in 23: 23 f.: "Am I a God at hand, saith Yahweh, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith Yahweh. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith Yahweh;" and in Isa. 43: 2: "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." It is a conspicuous thought in the later, chiefly the

post-exilic, psalms; see especially Ps. 139:5-10: "Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up unto heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me."

(d) The freedom of the knowledge of God from human limitations, or, in modern phrase, the omniscience. The proof of this is found by the Old Testament writers partly in his omnipresence. Thus in Ps. 139, in close connection with the passage just quoted, occur these words, vss. 3 and 4: "Thou searchest out my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Yahweh, thou knowest it altogether." It is also proved partly by his work in creation, as in Ps. 94:9: "He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see?" As this teaching is so closely allied with that of omnipresence, naturally the chronological development of the two is similar. One phase of God's omniscience emphasized frequently by the prophets is that his knowledge and power extend to the future, so that he not only plans the future, but carries out his plans.

3. The moral attributes of God. These are practically summed up in the term "the holiness of God," in its most common meaning. The words "holy," "holiness," etc., are translations of different Hebrew words from the root קדש. Their use begins early, as in Exod. 3:5, and they are common after that time. The etymological meaning of this root קדש is much disputed, and need not be discussed here. It seems evident, at any rate, that the fundamental meaning of the words as used of God is "exaltation": the holiness of God is his exaltation above the limitations of all created things. This exaltation may have various specific applications. It may have reference especially to power in various ways, the infinite in contrast with the finite; holiness then conveys "the idea of divine glory,

majesty, exaltation, greatness."²³ In this sense the holiness of God is practically equivalent to his majesty, of which we have spoken as including all his metaphysical attributes; but there is usually a special emphasis on the idea of power, omnipotence. This is the meaning of the term, *e. g.*, in the early passages, Exod. 15 : 11: "Who is like unto thee, O Yahweh, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" and 1 Sam. 2 : 2: "There is none holy as Yahweh, for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God." It is also found in some later passages, as in Hab. 3 : 3, "God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise," considered in connection with the following description of his majesty; and in Ps. 99 : 1-3: "Yahweh reigneth; let the peoples tremble: he sitteth upon the cherubim; let the earth be moved. Yahweh is great in Zion; and he is high above all the peoples. Let them praise thy great and terrible name: holy is he." But it is characteristic of the lofty teaching of the Old Testament that this exaltation should come to be thought of prominently on its ethical side. This means that exaltation above all the limitations of created things includes exaltation above their weakness, imperfection, and sin. So that the most common meaning of the term is to express the "ethical completeness" of God, as Dillmann calls it.²⁴ All attributes which go to make up the ethically complete character of God, all moral attributes, are therefore included in the term in this common meaning. In the later usage this conception of ethical completeness was often given a specific application, so that it meant especially moral purity, freedom from sin, exaltation above the sin of mankind. Isaiah especially emphasizes the holiness of God, and in his usage it often means freedom from sin, purity. This appears in Isa. 6 : 3, "And one cried unto another and said, Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory," taken in connection with 6 : 5: "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean

²³ PIEPENBRING, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 108.

²⁴ *Handbuch der alttestamentlichen Theologie*, p. 256.

lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips : for mine eyes have seen the King, Yahweh of hosts." As applied to men, the same meaning of the word "holy" is seen in Isa. 4 : 3, 4 : "And it shall come to pass that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, . . . when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof." A phrase which apparently originated with Isaiah, and is used frequently by him as descriptive of God, and but seldom elsewhere, except in Deutero-Isaiah, is "The Holy One of Israel." The meaning of this phrase is not that the holiness of Yahweh is expressly limited to his relation to Israel, but it indicates rather that in the relation of God to his chosen people, Israel, it is his holiness that is prominent. The implication is that God demands of his chosen people a holiness like his own.

A characteristic treatment of the matter of holiness is found in P, concerning the date of which there is difference of opinion. In this, especially in the so-called Law of Holiness, Lev., chaps. 17-26, it is expressly said that God, because he is holy, demands holiness of his people, and this is the reason for the specific laws, moral and ceremonial, given in this code. Here purity is the prominent thought in holiness. The fundamental thought is expressed in such passages as Lev. 11 : 44 : "For I am Yahweh your God : sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy; for I am holy;" and 19 : 2, 3 : "Ye shall be holy: for I, Yahweh your God, am holy. Ye shall fear every man his mother, and his father, and ye shall keep my sabbaths: I am Yahweh your God."

The following moral attributes of God may be mentioned as subdivisions under his holiness, in the common meaning of ethical completeness :

(a) Faithfulness, trustworthiness, as a result of his eternal existence. In speaking of the eternity of God it was mentioned that that attribute was commonly considered, not in itself, but in its results. The chief practical result is that God is always the same; his plans and purposes, his character, are the same in every age. This thought appears frequently throughout the Old

Testament. Besides occurring as a frequent inference when the eternity of God is mentioned, this attribute connects itself chiefly with two words. One is the word "living," so often applied to Yahweh. This means, not merely that he is alive, in contrast with dead idols, but that he is ever the same living force in the world. The other is the name itself, Yahweh, the name of the God of Israel. This probably means etymologically *the existing one*. But this is to be understood religiously rather than metaphysically. He is the one who *is*, alike to every generation. This is strongly suggested by Exod. 3:14, where Yahweh himself explains the name as meaning "I am that I am," and in 3:15 he goes on to speak of himself as "Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," and adds: "This is my name forever, and this is my memorial unto all generations."

(b) The righteousness of God. This attribute is expressed chiefly by various words derived from the root צדק. These words are used of God in a variety of ways. In general, however, there may be distinguished two classes of meanings, a broad and a narrow. In the broadest sense "righteousness" is used as practically equivalent to "holiness," meaning ethical completeness. When not used quite so broadly, it means the ethical completeness considered with special reference to some particular attribute. This attribute is often faithfulness; that is, God's righteousness is seen in his keeping his promises, regarding his covenant, and caring for those who trust in him. When this last thought is prominent, righteousness often approaches closely to the idea of mercy, as in the prayer of Ps. 31:2: "Deliver me in thy righteousness." The consideration of righteousness in these broader meanings is sufficiently covered at other points in our discussion.

In the narrower sense the righteousness of God means his justice; that is, in his relations with men he gives to each man what is his due. In a general way it is a legal term, as in our modern use; but, as used of God, justice is of course conformity, not to a human law, but to the divine standard of right, existing in the divine nature, and made known to men by revelation.

Justice includes, of course, the reward of the deserving and the punishment of the wicked. But, as God is dealing with sinful men, his justice is more frequently manifested in the latter way, in punishment.

In the earlier times the punishment most frequently mentioned in the Old Testament is that visited upon the enemies of Israel. Many have claimed, therefore, that in the early times it is not justice that Yahweh manifests, but favoritism. That is, it is asserted that Yahweh is represented as favoring Israel because they are his chosen people, and as punishing their enemies simply as enemies, without regard to the merits of the case. This would be another manifestation of the idea of national gods. An example of this is said to be the destruction of the Canaanites in order that the Hebrews might have their land.

Without discussing this view in detail, several considerations may be presented in answer. It may be granted that in form and details some of these early punishments are not such as would be inflicted at the present time. But this does not mean that they were unjust, cruel, or unwarranted. It means simply that they were adapted to the ideas and customs of the times, in order to make the needed impression. In their fundamental purpose they were fully in accordance with justice. This is seen when it is remembered that the chief reason given, for example, for the destruction of the Canaanites is their terrible moral corruption, which is so great as to render their destruction just and necessary. It must also be kept in mind that in the Old Testament a nation is often thought of collectively. This is especially true in the earlier portions, and with particular reference to the fate of nations. Hence a nation is often punished or rewarded as a whole according to its predominant national character.

A great advance in thought comes with the time of the prophets. Previous to their time it had often been insisted upon that God would and did punish Israel for their sins. But Amos is the first writer of certain date who emphasizes so strongly the universal justice of Yahweh as to predict the downfall of Israel as a punishment for sin; who affirms that God will

not only chasten, but destroy his own nation. This is taught in many passages, such as Amos 2:6-8, 14-16; 3:2; 5:1-2, 18-24; 7:9; and 9:1-4. Note especially 5:2: "The virgin of Israel is fallen; she shall no more rise: she is cast down upon her land; there is none to raise her up." Chap. 3:2 makes a new application of God's relation to his people: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore will I visit upon you all your iniquities." This teaching was incredible to the hearers of Amos, who had thought that their relation to God as his chosen people guaranteed them immunity from destruction. It may be noted also that such a conception of the justice of God was utterly unknown in any other nation in the time of Amos. The Assyrian hosts went forth to wars of conquest, of aggrandizement, and of cruelty, with the same confidence that their gods were fighting on their side as when their cause was just. In general, the nations of antiquity believed that they might be defeated in war because their gods were angry and refused to help them, or because the gods of other nations were more powerful than theirs; but that God's justice was such that he could hand over his own people to destruction on account of their sins was a conception utterly unheard of outside of Israel.

This thought of Amos is carried on by Isaiah, who emphasizes the teaching that Yahweh is the judge of all the earth, dealing with all nations on the same principles of justice, as in 3:13; 2:19, 21; 10:23; 14:26; and 28:22. Note especially 3:13: "Yahweh standeth up to plead, and standeth to judge the peoples."

In the later times God's justice in relation to the individual as well as to the nation is emphasized more fully than in the early writings.

(c) Another general attribute of God is his goodness, which manifests itself in mercy, grace, and love. Mercy and grace will first be considered. Mercy, according to the usual definition, is help to the needy; grace, favor to the undeserving. In the Old Testament use, however, they are not sharply distinguished, and may be considered together. The attribute

expressed by these two words is ascribed to God throughout the Old Testament. An early expression of God's mercy is in connection with the second commandment, *Exod. 20:6*, where Yahweh speaks of himself as "showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments."

One very significant manifestation of God's grace is in his "longsuffering." This describes what is in a sense a triumph of mercy over justice. It is God showing mercy to men by delaying long to inflict punishment when it is richly deserved.

The mercy of God is a prominent theme with the prophets, even with many of those whose threats of punishment are most severe. These threats are interspersed with exhortations to repent and seek mercy from God. It is always implied, and frequently stated, that God will show mercy, and not simply justice, however aggravated the offense may be, if the people will only repent, although sometimes the message is only of punishment, because the people were supposed to be beyond the point where repentance was probable.

Naturally, it is God's mercy to Israel that finds chief expression, yet there are not lacking many indications that this quality is manifested also to other nations. Perhaps the most striking expression of the broadness of God's plans of mercy is found in *Isa. 19:24, 25*: "In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth: for that Yahweh of hosts hath blessed them, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance." Here Isaiah puts Egypt and Assyria, the inveterate enemies of Israel, on an equality with the chosen people as sharers in God's plans of mercy.

The same thought finds expression in the book of *Jonah*. Whatever other lessons this book may have been designed to teach, one of its most prominent lessons is certainly this: God shows mercy, even after specific threat of punishment, to a foreign nation that repents of its sins.

Closely connected with the mercy and grace of God is his love. In reality, they are the manifestation of love. Yet, while mercy and grace are spoken of in all the Old Testament, it is only in

the prophets that the love of God is prominent. It is spoken of quite independently of mercy and grace.

The thought of the love of Yahweh for Israel is implied rather than expressly stated when Israel is called the son, or firstborn son, of Yahweh. This term is common in early times, as in Exod. 4 : 22, 23 : "And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith Yahweh, Israel is my son, my firstborn : and I have said unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me ; and thou hast refused to let him go : behold, I will slay thy son, thy first-born ;" and in the later times as well. The correlated term, Yahweh as the father of Israel, is also frequent, as in Deut. 32 : 6 ; Isa. 63 : 16, etc.

It is the prophet Hosea who most tenderly depicts the love of Yahweh for Israel when he compares it to the love of a husband for a wife, even a love which triumphs over repeated acts of infidelity, and leads the husband to try every means to win back to himself the erring wife. This is seen plainly in Hos. 3 : 1 : "And Yahweh said unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend and an adulteress, even as Yahweh loveth the children of Israel, though they turn unto other gods, and love cakes of raisins." Other expressions of the love of God are found in Hos. 11 : 3, 4, 8 ; 14 : 4-9. This love is so intense that it must awaken an answering love on the part of the people, 2 : 15 ; 3 : 5. Hosea's fundamental thought is "that the relation between Jehovah and Israel is a relation of love and of such duties as flow from love."²⁵

IV. Here a few lessons may be suggested which to some extent sum up the conclusions reached in a practical form.

1. The Old Testament teaching concerning God is radically different from the conceptions of the nations surrounding Israel. The most fundamental difference is that the religion of the Old Testament is ethical, being based on a conception of a God of exalted holiness. The impartial justice and the abounding mercy of God are the manifestations of this holiness. None of the weakness, partiality, and human imperfection which are found in all the gods of the other nations appear in the character of

²⁵ W. ROBERTSON SMITH, *The Prophets of Israel*, p. 163.

Yahweh. Here is a teaching which cannot be accounted for except as the result of divine revelation.

2. There is no warrant for thinking that the Old Testament teaching is similar to the prevailing idea of national gods, even although Israel is the chosen people of Yahweh. Neither is there any reason for holding that the Old Testament narrows God's activity to his own nation alone. The choice of Israel was plainly necessary in the plan of God. But, while it is naturally God's relations to Israel that are chiefly mentioned, yet his activity, his judgment upon sin, and his plans of mercy disregard this national limitation. There is nothing narrow in the Old Testament teaching concerning God; he is the Lord of all the earth.

3. While the relation to the New Testament teaching has not been directly mentioned, yet it must be obvious. So far as the doctrine of God is concerned, these two parts of the Bible are not in contrast, but in harmony; their fundamental teachings are the same. There are, of course, many differences in the phrases used, and in the matter of emphasis, and fuller teaching on many points in the New Testament, and also much new teaching in the New Testament. The holiness of God, for example, we have seen to be made very prominent in the Old Testament. In the New Testament it is seldom directly mentioned; it is assumed, but not specially emphasized. Many think that the Old Testament presents God as a God of justice and vengeance; the New Testament, as a God of love. But really both parts agree in teaching that, while God is a God of justice, yet his mercy and love belong to the very essence of his character. The sunshine of God's love illumines and warms both the Old and the New Testaments.